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INDIANA QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF HISTORY

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GEORGE S. COTTMAN, *Editor*

EDITORIAL.

NEWSPAPER HISTORY—THE STRAWTOWN MYTH.

Much has been said of the fiction in history—even the history that is accepted as reputable—and when it comes to a certain kind of loosely written local history based upon vague tradition and the desire to make a “story,” the “history” not infrequently becomes pure fiction. History as written by newspaper space-fillers is quite often of this character; and as it is, perhaps, more widely read and receives just as much credence as bona fide history, one is almost tempted sometimes to wonder why one should take the trouble to try to get at the truth of things, anyway.

A fair example of what we mean is a “good stuff” story which bobs up in the papers periodically to the effect that the village of Strawtown, in Hamilton county, came within one vote of being chosen as the place for the State’s capital. One variant of the story is that on that fateful day when the commissioners who had the business in hand came to vote on the location, one or two who favored Strawtown had gone fishing and did not get to vote; hence Strawtown missed the chance of its life. Evidently this has been told so often in Strawtown that the citizens of that historically ambitious burg really believe it. One feels some curiosity as to how the tradition ever got started.

In the first place, in 1820, when the capital was located, there was no Strawtown, except as the site of an Indian village, and there is not the slightest record that the commissioners ever visited it or gave it a thought. The documents bearing upon that important work are very few, the only circumstantial one being the journal of John Tipton, one of the commissioners. The question of location was decided at the cabin of John McCormick, where Indianapolis now stands, and there is nothing said about

any division of sentiment. The only source of information we have upon this point simply says: "We met at McCormick's, and, on my motion, the commissioners came to a resolution to select and locate," etc.; the "etc." being a description of the ground chosen.

Nevertheless, the Strawtown myth will continue to be a source of profit to space-fillers, and in time, no doubt, will find its way into respectable history company and pass there for bona fide.

INDIANA GEOGRAPHICAL NOMENCLATURE.

We call attention to Mr. J. P. Dunn's article in this number on "Indiana Geographical Nomenclature," called forth by an article under the same caption in our last issue. Mr. Dunn's contribution, dealing almost entirely with our Indian names, on which he speaks as an authority, illustrates the corruptions that are common, not only to the forms of these borrowed names that perpetuate the memory of a vanished race, but also to the origin and meanings of them. It is a contribution of value.

OLD INDIANAPOLIS MAP.

Among the recent acquisitions of the State Library is a map of Indianapolis, engraved in 1836 by W. Woodruff, of Cincinnati, and published by William Sullivan, who is also given as the surveyor. This map is exceedingly rare, it being, indeed, a discovery to local antiquarians. It shows the platting of the out lots of the Donation surrounding the mile square as laid out by Alexander Ralston, and also locates certain public houses and residences of that day. In Ralston's map of 1821 squares 12, 19 and 90 are shown as unplatted reservations, and the rectangular system of streets with the four diagonals is broken by North and South Carolina streets, running parallel with Pogue's run on either side. In the map of 1836 the reservations are platted into lots and the two streets mentioned do not appear. A unique feature is a supplementary engraving of four concentric circles surrounding a picture of the State House. In the first circular space are the counties of the State arranged in alphabetical order and radiating from the center. In the next space

are the corresponding county seats; in the third their distance in miles from the capital, and in the fourth their direction. The engraving is beautifully done and the map is as good as new.

STATE BANKING IN INDIANA.

Number 15 of "The Indiana University Studies" is a study in "State Banking in Indiana" from 1814 to 1873, by Logan Esarey, A. M. It represents a part of the work that is being attempted in the history of the State by the Indiana Historical Survey, organized under the direction of the Department of History and Political Science of the University at Bloomington, and it shows the high standard of that work, a brief description of which was given in our last issue. Mr. Esarey's handling of this important subject is the most ambitious and the most thorough that has yet appeared. The body of it deals with the first and second State banks, the free banks of 1852, and the Bank of the State of Indiana, of 1855. There are statistical appendices, and a bibliography of sources.

THE IRVINGTON HOME-COMING.

On August 27, 28, 29, 30, Irvington, Indianapolis, celebrated her fortieth anniversary by a home-coming. For further information about Irvington we would refer the reader to a historical sketch of the place in this magazine for December, 1911. The celebration was quite in keeping with the character of the "classic suburb." There were cordial informal gatherings with plenty of the best music procurable; "seeing Irvington" auto rides in autos furnished by the citizens; a colossal picnic dinner on the Butler College campus, in which everybody joined, and gorgeous fireworks capping the festival. The greatest feature, perhaps, of the occasion was an afternoon—an ideally pleasant summer afternoon—on the shady greensward of the large school yard, with a diversified program of addresses, reminiscences and music. The speech-making was graceful, witty and genial.

The home-coming custom is spreading through Indiana year by year; and it is a beautiful custom, that carries with it much that is quickening.